

# FGA - Up and Down

by Alan Charlton

Derek Jordan asked if I might put down a few reminiscences of the long-departed Fancy Guppy Association, the FGA, and some of the guppy enthusiasts and the fish on show. My first thought was - there can't be much to say about an organisation that left practically no records and effectively died nearly a quarter of a century ago, in 1983. And I can't think of any people still around who would remember much of it. Then I thought - well, it was a pretty funny organisation. One with examples of "how not to do things" I suspect, but there were some good points too. Maybe there is enough to say about it. As for the people and the fish, well, the people were ordinary on the whole; there were few really outstanding eccentrics, the others ranged from pleasant people to those who really got on your wick. Memories of fish are rather washed away and changed with time. What was memorable and unusual then may seem like nothing much now. In 1966 red-tailed half-black broadtails were stunning and exciting, for instance, but they seem pretty dull by comparison with what has been developed out of half-black since. It's a bit like asking someone what their favourite film is - the more recent good ones displace the older ones.

Anyway, the FGA was probably the most successful guppy club in the UK and it does deserve some sort of memorial. Who else would be prepared to write it now? O.K., I see I have volunteered. I do tend to ramble on a bit once I get going but that is part of a memorial!

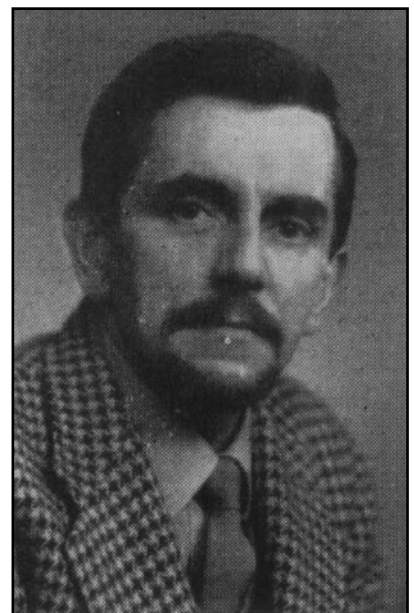
Where did I fit into it? With my wife Anne, I was a member from 1969 to the end in 1983, specialising in top sword guppies. At various times I was the Treasurer of the Manchester Section and briefly of the Association, and I was the last Chairman of the Judges and Standards Committee, with Anne as Secretary. All the photographs here, except those scanned from magazines, are by Anne or myself. Apologies for the dodgy quality of the Prinzcolor ones! I am very grateful to two other old stagers of the FGA - John Hesketh and Tom Hallett - for reading an early version of this screed and making helpful comments, and providing more history. I also thank Tom for providing 1961 editions of FGA and FGBS Standard Handbooks which gave valuable information.

# The History

The FGA was then founded in 1960 by a small handful of guppy enthusiasts in the Manchester area who had mostly belonged to the FBGS but wanted an organisation which was aimed more at broadtail guppies. The first Standards Handbook, published in 1961, reads as though the initial aim was exclusively to promote the breeding and showing of American-type broadtails. The first chairman of the FGA, Jim Kelly, and longtime committee member Fred Campbell were among the group of founders, which also included a Mr. A. Bloom who I believe was an FNAS judge. But the tone of the organisation was set by Kelly. The organisation must have got off to a flying start, as by 1961 there were three Area Secretaries, for the Northern, Midlands, and Southern Areas.

Probably the first guppy club in the UK was the GBS (the Guppy Breeders Society, I think) which was founded in the late 1930's and went into abeyance during the Second World War. It must have been a friendly little society because in it Bert Brock met Gladys and then married her, and they were still married and keeping guppies in the 1970's. Some time after the war when fish-keeping rose in popularity again members of the GBS were involved in starting the next organisation, the Federation of Guppy Breeder's Societies (FGBS). By the 1950's broadtail guppies were well-known from American magazines and were becoming available and popular in the UK. The FGBS however continued the interests of the GBS and so its standards were mainly for short-tail guppies.

With my wife, I joined the FGA in early 1969 and it was in a process of change that hardly seemed to stop. I imagine Jim Kelly's grand vision encompassed a national association from the beginning and at the time we joined there was not only the founding Section in Manchester, there were Sections in Glasgow, Liverpool, Birmingham, Radlett (Herts), West London (I think), Edmonton (north London), and South London. Most of the sections had some ex-FGBS members. There had been a Pennine Section in the Burnley/Blackburn/Accrington area but this had already been absorbed back into the Manchester group. The Scottish group was practically non-existent in 1969 and the Liverpool group was hanging on by the skin of its teeth. It's a reflection on the different state of personal transport then - it was claimed that the Liverpool Section was dying because a long drawn out bus strike in Liverpool had prevented members from attending meetings.



Jim Kelly about 1970  
Reproduced with permission  
from Petfish Monthly

Although Jim Kelly had conceived a national organisation, up until 1970-1971 all the Association's administrative officers came from the founding Manchester Section and the AGM's were held in Manchester. The Judges and Standards Committee had a chairman and secretary but all judges were effectively members so it was more national in character. It was obvious as the association grew that the main events of the FGA needed to be held in a more central location, so the main show of the year, the International Show, was moved to Birmingham in 1970, and then the association's AGM was held in Birmingham from 1971 onwards. At the 1971 AGM the northern officers were replaced by members from the Birmingham and London areas by procedures which still leave a rather nasty taste in the mouth.

New Sections appeared..... and Sections went. There was a short-lived West Sussex one, in the Brighton area, I think. A section was set up in Lancaster in 1971-2 largely by the efforts of Bob Peck and Jeff Hutchings. Bob was notable for his ability to raise one foot straight up over his head - he had an artificial leg! Lancaster was a bit far north to attract many visitors from other areas and this section migrated southwards by steps - to Preston, then to Warrington, changing its name to North-West Lancs in the process, and absorbing the last remains of the Manchester section too after that section folded in 1975-6. The last new section was the Tyne and Wear which had a brief life in about 1978-1979, unless you count the Metropolitan Section which was a late amalgamation taking in all the remaining members in the London area.

The sections had monthly meetings and even at the maximum membership of the Association, something around 450, the smaller sections weren't really viable. They didn't have meetings big enough to make it worthwhile having speakers, the monthly show of fish was small, and it was hardly worth the trip for visitors from other sections, even nearby ones. Actually visits to other sections were a matter of some contention anyway, it was pointed out that Birmingham members would be using all the Sundays of a month if they went to their own meetings, and also meetings of Manchester and a couple of London sections.

## Shows

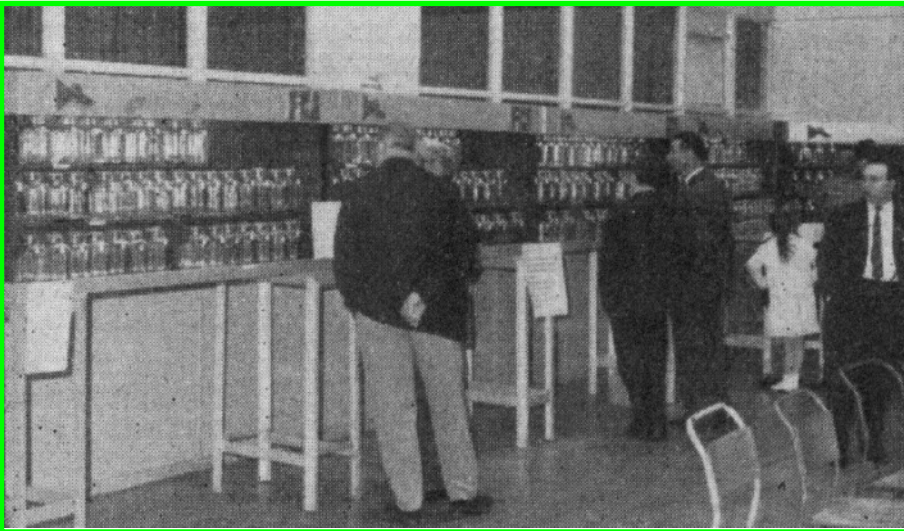
Sections were expected to have a show at each meeting, and an annual Open Show, plus there was from 1966 onwards the annual International Open Show. Actually the show and award rules of the FGA made it necessary to go to a lot of meetings/shows if you were to advance along the glory trail of the show bench - the "Star Trail". You started off wearing a guppy-shaped Bronze Badge and with successes on the show bench progressed along through Silver and Gold, to a Gold Jewelled Badge which had originally been intended as the highest award you could get. More detail on this elsewhere!



Gold Badge  
at 20th  
Star Award

The International Open Show in its heyday was well worth a visit. The first one of all was held jointly with the British Killifish Association in 1966 in a Territorial Army Drill Hall perhaps half a mile from the centre of Manchester. It was a two-day event over a weekend in June, I believe open to the public only on the Sunday. Visitors were encouraged - the show was even advertised in the aquarium journals. We went to see the show for the killifish and came away more impressed by the guppies. Also the fact that you could see the guppies on their bright stands, while the killifish seemed to lurk in dark containers (even though they were staged on borrowed FGA stands!). This was where I was first impressed by a snakeskin top sword, but the colours of the broadtails made a big impression too. There were over 200 entries, including a few entries from Europe I believe.

**The first International Guppy and Killiefish Show at the  
Ardwick Drill Hall, Manchester, 11th and 12th June 1966**



The stands of Fancy Guppies with some admirers



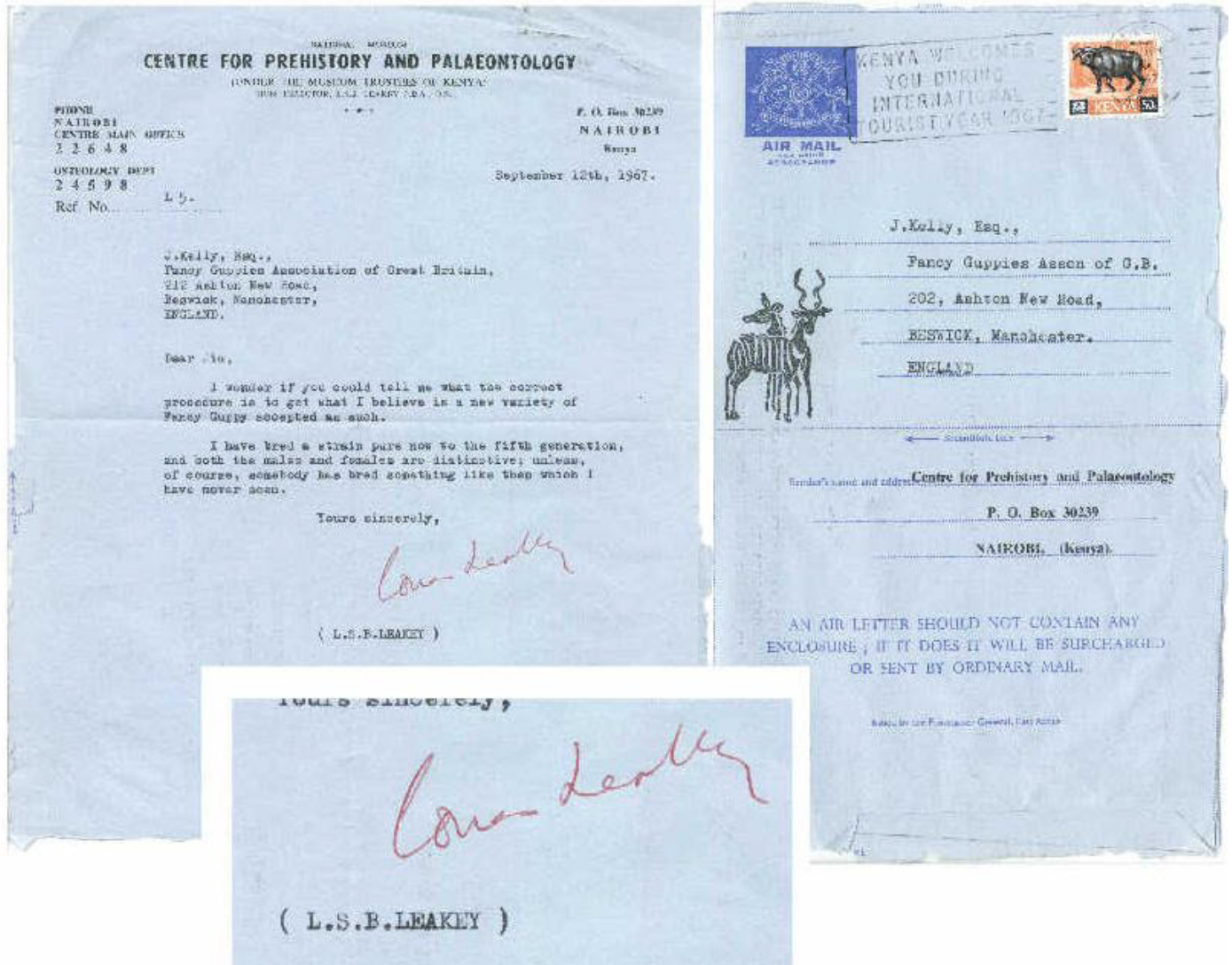
The British Killifish Association exhibits on borrowed stands



Arthur Goodall, Jim Kelly, and George Goodall with trophies... Somehow I think Jim didn't win the big trophy, he was presenting it!



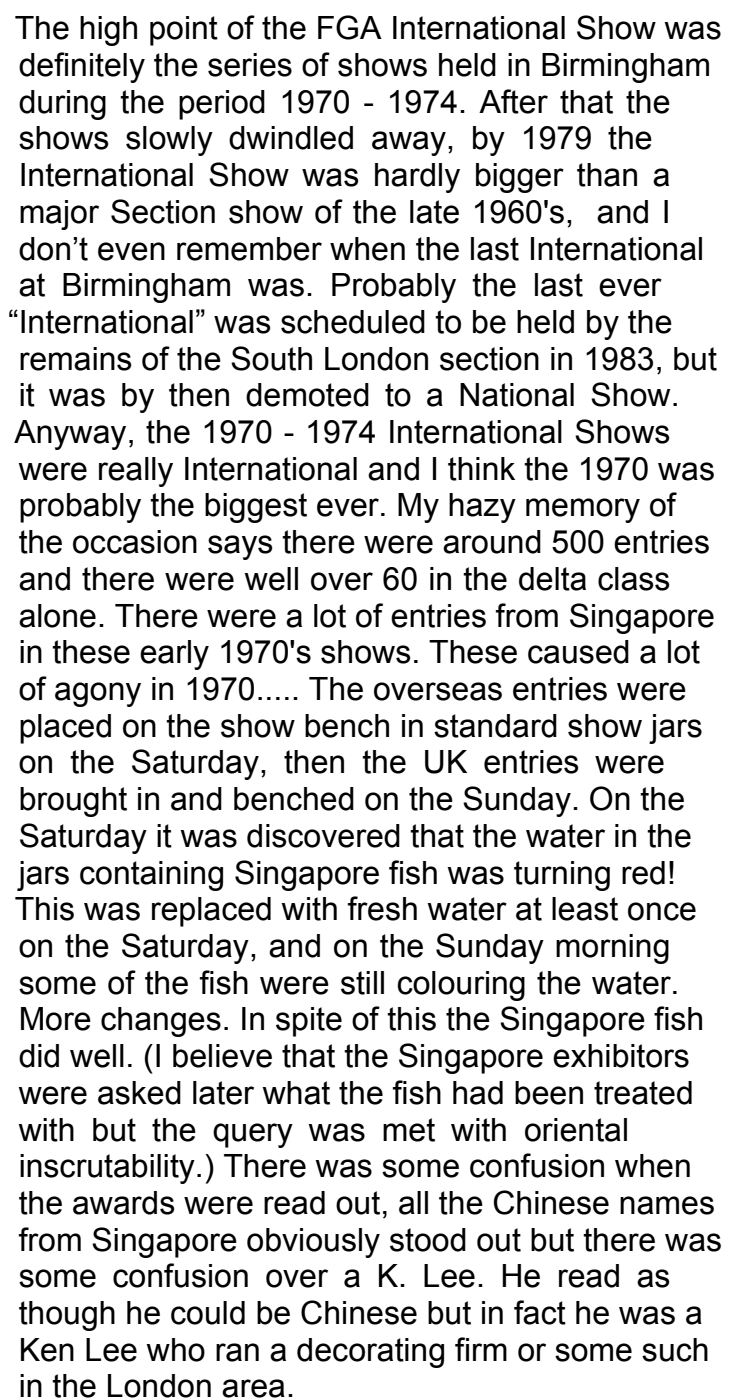
Two subsequent shows were held in this venue, unencumbered by killifish, and the standard of fish was about the same. As before there were some entries from overseas and the 1967 show even had an entry from Kenya. The eminent anthropologist Louis Leakey, working in Kenya, used to amuse himself with some experimental guppy breeding and sent a sample for the show. I don't remember these fish but the opinion I got later was - he deserved a Nobel Prize for his anthropology but definitely not for his guppy-breeding. See copy of his letter below.....



The 1967 show is linked in our memory with the date 4th June 1967, the day a British Midland Airways plane crashed in the middle of Stockport killing 72 people. As we drove along Stockport Road to the show we wondered why there were so many ambulances about, as at the time we had no idea this had happened. Tragically the plane had crashed as a result of a design fault in the fuel system, and poor safety design resulted in the high death toll.



Grandson of Metropolitan







Inspecting the trophies (and the raffle prizes) at the International Show in 1973 or 1974. The big one at the top is the Calgary Trophy for Section gaining the most awards - normally won by the Edmonton Section.

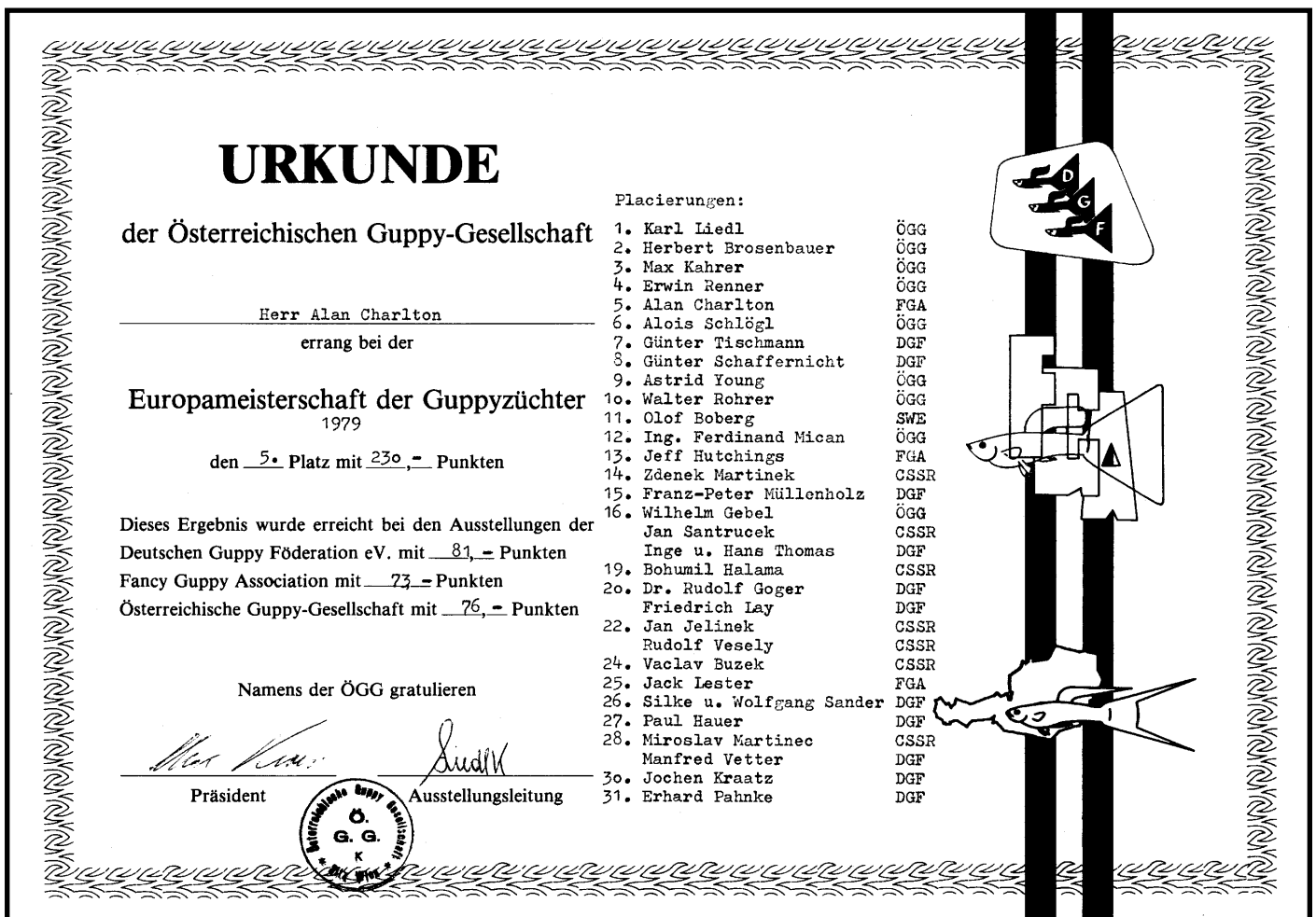
The inspector is Horace Baldwin of the Manchester section.

Obviously overseas entries to these shows would not be returned. In 1970 only FGA members who had sent fish overseas themselves in the previous year were allowed to choose from the overseas entries themselves, but subsequently it was realised the overseas entries could be a quite serious source of funds - and they were auctioned off by a bid-board system or by a live auction. I remember on one occasion hearing myself bid £15 for a set of half-black swordtails (with some surprise) and even then I didn't win the lot. In my recollection very little came from these overseas exhibits subsequently but you have to remember these were mature fish that had been through a major ordeal, they may have been the result of hybrid breeding programmes, and in the case of females they may have been fertilised by any sort of male or perhaps given a dose of hormones.

Although the FGA International Show received entries from overseas from 1966 well into the 1970's (and there was a short-lived "World Guppy Championship" held at it too, in 1974 certainly, see left) not too many fish went in the other direction. Malcolm Delingpole from the Birmingham section went to the Austrian International Show in 1968, taking some of his own fish and also fish from any handy breeders he could contact at the time. These fish would have had a hair-raising journey (or would it be scale-raising?) as Malcolm had racing experience and went by road, probably making the journey within a day. In Vienna Phil Jinks won the cofer tail class and Malcolm Delingpole won the veiltail (=Original Veiltail of the FGA), pintail and speartail. I think of these classes only the cofertail class had entries from more than one breeder, in fact the show entries seem to have been mainly broadtail. The Tropical Fish Hobbyist magazine had a major feature on this show, including photographs of most of the class winners, in the November 1968 issue. This is well worth a look if you can find a copy.



Other than this scattered entries were sent to Europe by air and won a few scattered cards but I don't remember who sent them now, except my friend Peigi Young sent some topswords over at one time. Probably the European Guppy Championship in 1979 had the best FGA results. It had three legs, Vienna, Berlin, and Birmingham. I won first and second in the grey-bodied snakeskin (filigree) delta class at Berlin, from Vienna I have cards for first and second in Schwerttypen blond - I sent topswords. I don't have much record for the Birmingham leg, I remember I used blond snakeskin topswords and they won their class with a miserly 73 points. I came 5th overall in the European Championship in 1979. It was probably the only time I actually timed my breeding to produce fish for shows - I had to do that for three spaced shows. There were a couple of other English names from the North-West Lancashire Section on the 1979 results - Jeff Hutchings was quite a serious breeder, Jack Lester a passing breeder who actually had some of my topsword stock.



Sorry, couldn't resist including this souvenir of the European Guppy Championship!



The standard of exhibition at FGA shows was very good, with purpose-built illuminated stands carrying three shelves of uniform rather tall square show jars (at least while it was possible to get the preferred shape of jar in quantity, the wider squat variety used in most other fish shows had to be accepted later). The stands were lit by fluorescent tube, which might have been expected to degrade the colour of the guppies a bit, but I don't remember any problems from this. It was only when I became involved with the organisation of the FGA that I appreciated how much care had gone into the design of the stands. I believe John Jeffery had a lot to do with the design. The shelves, ends, and backplates dismantled and all stowed into the box formed by the top and bottom pieces, which was held closed by two long screws. This produced a flat stackable coffin-like box and most venues had no problem finding storage space for them and the two support pieces they stood on. All the sections used the same stands for all shows. They were also used for stands at the British Aquarists Festival at Belle Vue, but with purpose-made small tanks.



The stands also accommodated judges cups of tea etc. Danny Glen (Manchester) and Sam Croft (Birmingham, back view)



Setting up at BAF 1973  
Peigi Young, John Hesketh, Tom Hallett.

The FGA had stands at the BAF in three years I think, in 1973 and 1974 put on by the Manchester section and in one later year (1976?) by the North-West Lancs section. Even in the 1970's the crowds at the BAF had to be experienced to be believed, and the idea of exhibiting was more to put guppies under the noses of the British Public and attract members than anything else. The stands put on by the Manchester section were manned all the time too with this in mind. All these years later I still find it hard to believe how few members were gained from this effort. However we did gain two or three members who'd travelled a long way to the BAF - from South Wales and from the Glasgow area. I suppose the lack of converts was the same problem that guppy societies in the UK have always had - your average aquarist hasn't the patience for selective breeding and wants fish that produce great results immediately and keep on producing them for ever. Sorry, I just had to put in this moan from way back! It was something that we were always fighting.

More amusing, in retrospect, were some of the problems encountered setting up at BAF. The first year we did it, the weather was icy cold, the Belle Vue Exhibition Hall was unheated, the water was icy and dubious quality. To cap it all the FNAS show staff had got all their entry paperwork in a twist. On account of that, the night the entries were booked in we didn't get away until after 4 am and we didn't warm up until well into the next day. The following year we felt forewarned, and actually took lots of pre-warmed water along. And warm clothes. I remember driving there with the boot of the car filled with all this water in large plastic bowls, in poly bags to prevent spilling, and it made the car waver very oddly on corners! Just to show, the weather was quite pleasant and the FNAS had got their act together so we emerged in good condition at a reasonable time after booking our entries in.



FGA stand at BAF after setting up, before the judging and before the public came in. The "flag" was a last-minute addition to make our identity visible from afar!



Setting up at BAF 1973  
Tom Hallett, Jeff Hutchings,  
Ray Young



The public examining  
the FGA stand



Manning the stand could be tiring!  
Fred Campbell relaxes



# The Star Trail

I suppose it was Jim Kelly who devised the torture procedure known as the "Star Trail" which was set up like an Old Spanish Custom - in other words a tradition of doing things in some amazingly cumbrous, painful and illogical way, because that was the way they had always been done. You advanced along the Star Trail by obtaining first place "Star" awards at Section and Open Shows.....the awards had to be either 73, 75 or 80 points or above, depending on the stage in the trail, Open Show or Section Show, and whether the exhibit was single fish or breeder's teams (which were normally of 4 fish then). The first version of the scheme I have seen was from 1961 and it seems to have had all this complexity from the start. You started with a Bronze Badge, and progressed to a Silver Badge at Star 5, Gold at Star 10, then there was a long slog to Star 20 and the Breeder's Diploma. After that - originally you could only get as far as the Gold Jewelled Badge award on the Star Trail, at the 30th star. This was a killer step though as all the last 10 awards had to be won at Open Shows, not the monthly Section shows. Nevertheless in the late 1960's there were some very active breeders who claimed they had actually gone twice round the circle of 30 Star awards, and they were in theory to be awarded a bar to the Gold Jewelled Badge. I don't remember ever seeing one.

But then it was decided by the Judges and Standards Committee that the Star Trail would have to be extended by more difficult steps, and special Breeders classes were devised for these between 1970 and 1975 or so. The last edition of the Standards Handbook (undated, first issued in 1973-1974) is quite obscure on how these worked. First there was the Advanced Master Breeders Class, which required 14 matched fish (7 males and 7 females as single male and female, plus breeders males, breeders females, and breeders pairs). So now the aspiring breeder could aim for the Advanced Master Breeder's Badge at Star 40, that was 10 first place awards in this horrendous class at 75 points or more.

F.G.A. * STAR * ** Record Sheet				NAME		SECTION		
No.	Type	Pts. required	Award	Date	Venue	Class	Pts.	Judge
I	Any	Single Entries 75	Red and Silver Stars on Prize Cards.	2/2/69	MC	TOPS	76	Halliday
2	Variety	Breeders 73		1/6/69	MC	NET	76	Croft
3	of			6/7/69	MC	TOPS	75	Ridley
4	Guppy			3/8/69	MC	BP	73	Croft
5				7/9/69	MC	BF	74	Halliday
6	Any	Single Entries 80	change Bronze for Silver Badge	3/5/70	MC	BP	76	Ridley
7	Variety	Breeders 75	Red and Silver Stars	10/11/72	LC	BM	75	Halliday
8	of			2/1/73	MC	BM	75	Halliday
9	Guppy			3/6/73	MC	BP	78	Syden
10			change Silver for Gold	1/7/73	MC	GF	73	Dylen
11	Choice of:	5 Ists. with 5 DIFFERENT shapes.	Red and Gold Stars on Prize Cards.	5/8/73	MC	K	75	Ridley
12	Single	Single 75		5/8/73	MC	E	77	Ridley
13	or	5 Ists. with Matched PAIRS		28/4/74	B	M	76	Ridley
14	Breeders (Tick choice)	Breeders 73		28/4/74	B	U	77	Stadman
15				22/5/76	E	H	75	Croft
16	Breeders' Classes Only.	All Breeders' Classes with three or more Exhibitors in Class: Breeders 73	Red and Gold Stars.	20/6/76	NWL	BH	73	Hodkins
17				17/1/79	NWL	BH	77	Turley
18				21/10/79	Typ/West	BH	74	Hodkins
19				24/10/79	B	BH	73	Croft
20				28/10/79	B	BP	73	Farnell
21			Breeders Diploma awarded					
22		OPEN Shows Only						
23	Single	Either F.G.A. or any other recognised Aquarium Society.	Red and Gold Stars.					
24	Fish							
25	or							
26	Breeder	Single 75						
27	Teams	Breeders 73						
28								
29								
30			Gold Jewelled Badge					

Use the following abbreviations when completing your record.

S = single  
B = breeders

BMP = Breeders Matched Pairs  
BM = Breeders Males  
BF = Breeders Females  
MBE = Master Breeders.

Star Awards go to First Cards only

The Star Award Record Sheet

I don't remember anyone actually finishing this. But then just in case they devised the Grade One Male and Grade One Female Classes. These required teams of 8 matched fish. and finally when you got another 10 Grade One first place awards you got to Star 50 - well, I don't think a name was devised for the award here. Actually the Show Rules as published in the last edition of the Standards Handbook didn't even specify exactly the points level required for these last 10 awards. Perhaps no-one was really expected to make it.

continued.....

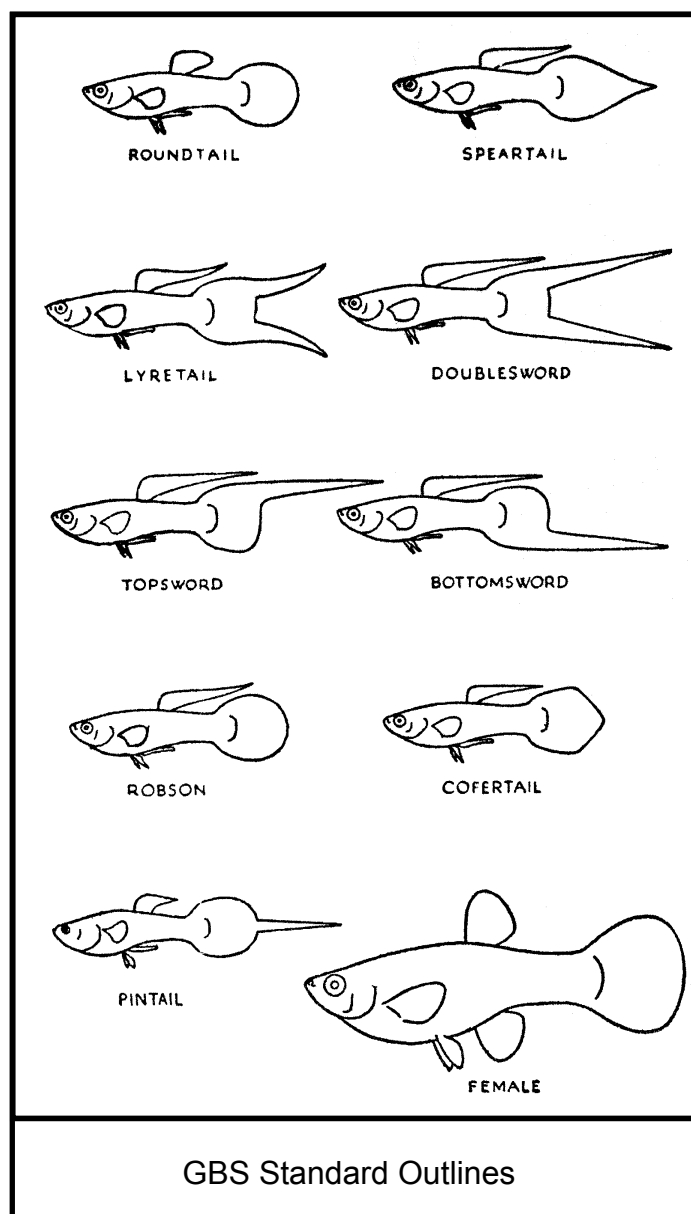


This handbook mysteriously also gives the make-up of a Master Breeders Class of 9 fish which doesn't appear in the Star Trail! The mists of time have erased the details of the final version of the Star Trail, without the Grade One and with the Master Breeder classes. It was never published in a Standards Handbook. By the time the last big hurdles had been introduced there were only maybe two breeders who were both active enough and far enough along the trail to bother to think about them. I only remember seeing a very few entries in these classes, and I don't personally remember anyone finishing one of these last steps. If anyone did do it, I would bet on it being Don Phillimore.

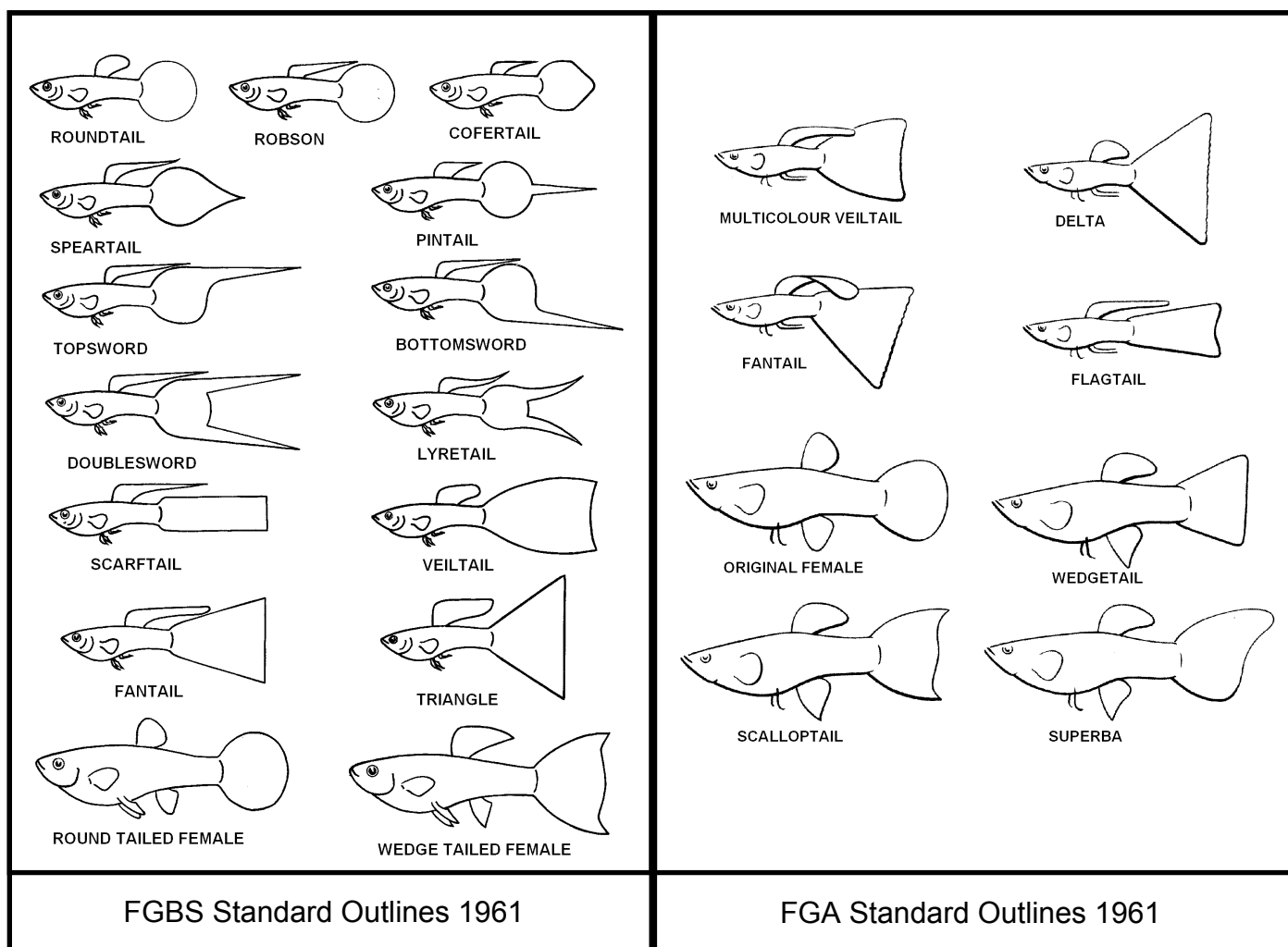
## The FGA Standard Outlines

The standards and the outlines caused various forms of agony and dissension during most of the life of the FGA. Some of what I have to say is coloured by my own opinions!

The first standard outlines for guppies in the UK were those produced by the pre-WW2 GBS. The diagrams here are actually redrawn from "All About Guppies" by Whitney and Hahnel (1964) and they're supposed to be derived from the pre-WW2 GBS standards. All the males are short-tails. I don't know who Robson was but I don't think his variety of guppy was ever recognised by the FGA in later times. After WW2 the FGBS continued the short-tail standards of the old GBS and added more outlines. The scarftail was probably the first, and I believe they added the veiltail too before the FGA got going. By the 8th edition, published in 1961, they had three broadtail outlines, Fantail, Triangle, and Veiltail. They also recognised a Wedge Tailed Female in addition to the original Round Tailed Female.



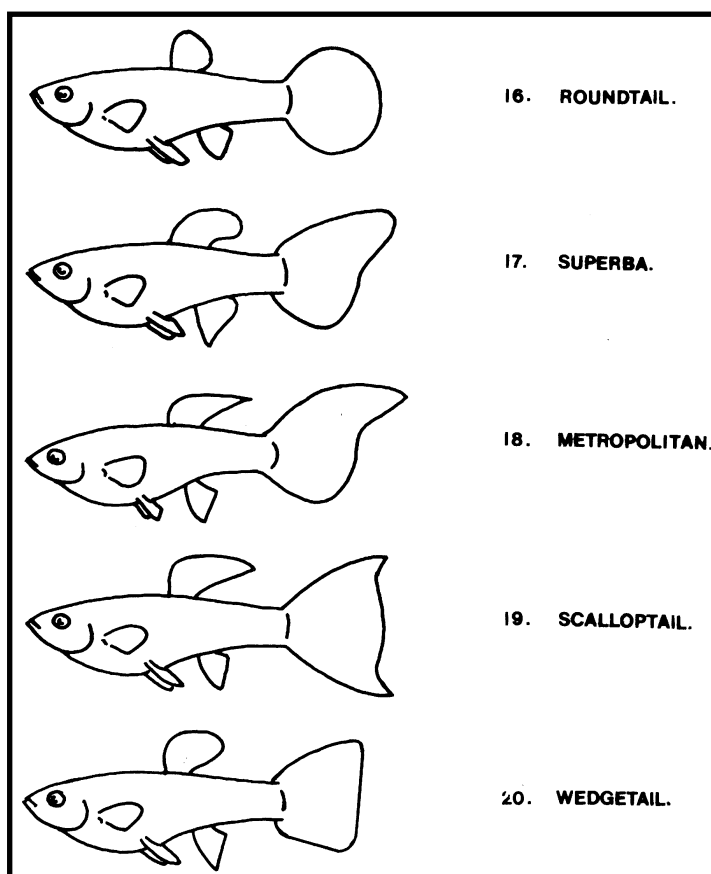
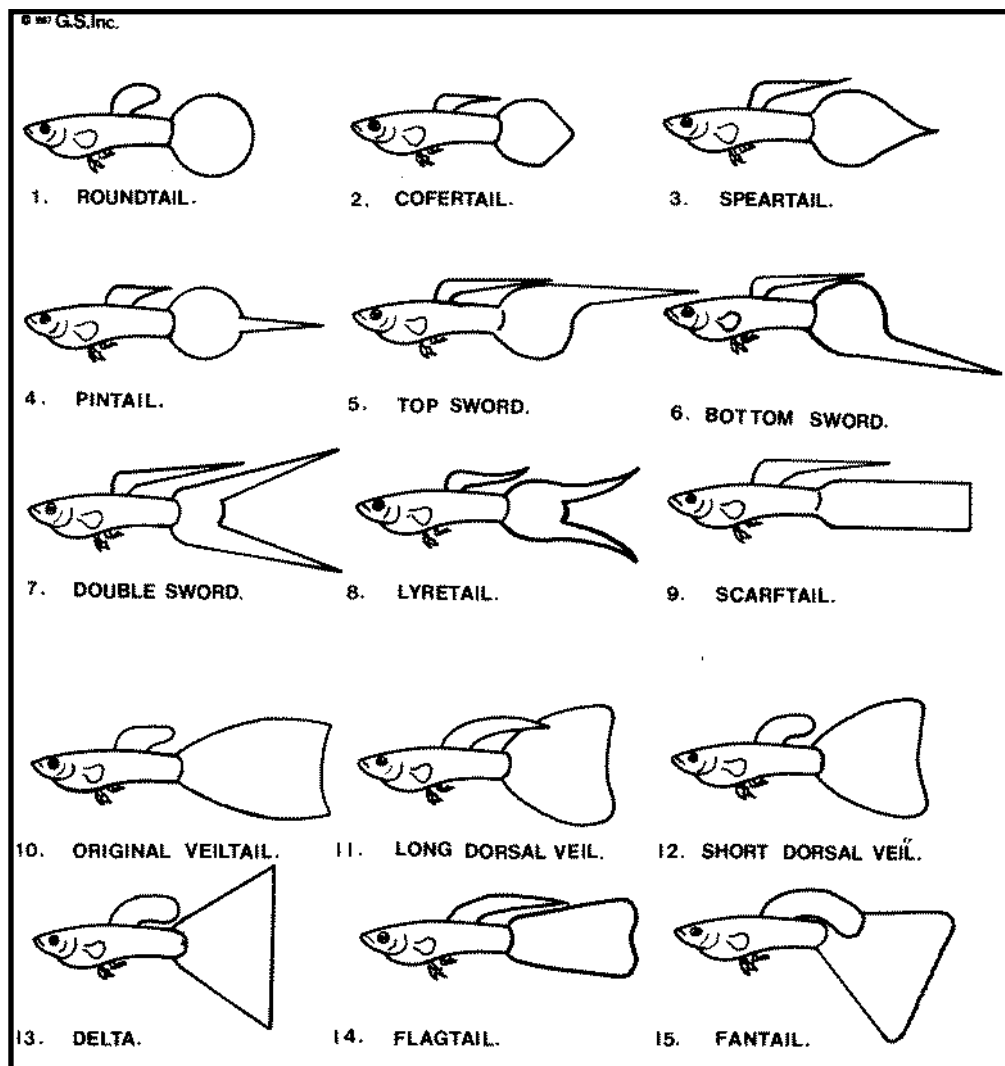
Obviously the blast-off point for the FGA standard outlines had to be the existing set of standards of the FGBS. But it is a moot point whether the FGA intended to blast off and leave the old standards behind completely. The FGA produced its first Standard Handbook in 1961. The eminent W.G. Phillips, who had agreed to be President of the FGA, wrote an introduction to the FGA handbook in which he said ".....the types shown in this booklet have been produced solely for the benefit of those interested in the American types of guppy....." The FGA Handbook shows 4 outlines of broadtail males only, a Multicolour Veiltail, Delta, Fantail and Flagtail plus 4 outlines of females, Original Female, Scalloptail, Wedgetail and Superba. It mentioned nothing of the short-tail standards. If the FGA intended to abandon these completely - it didn't work! They remained popular for the whole existence of the FGA.



These two handbooks from 1961 make a strange comparison now and I can only think this is the result of two competing groups of hobbyists deliberately pulling in different directions. Please bear with the following confusion! The FGA's Multicolour Veiltail was much like the FGBS veiltail except it had a long dorsal fin. The FGA Delta corresponded with the FGBS Triangle. The FGA Flagtail was like an FGBS Fantail but the caudal had rounded corners and a curved rear edge. The FGA Fantail was not like anything the FGBS recognised, it had long drooping dorsal and caudal fins and the caudal otherwise was delta-shaped. The FGA's Original Female corresponded to the FGBS Round Tailed Female (its caudal was to be "as round as possible"), and its Scalloptail Female was extremely like the FGBS Wedge Tailed Female and had the same waved edge to the caudal. There was an FGA Wedgetail which had a caudal with straight outlines, the upper longer than the lower, and resembled nothing the FGBS recognised. Lastly the FGA had the Superba female, again nothing like anything the FGBS had. The FGA also had a Colour class in shows for females, as did the FGBS. A separate Colour class for males only came later, but of course Colour classes were not outline-based.

By the time of the 1967 Standards Handbook six varieties of broadtail were recognised by the FGA, 9 short-tail, and 5 varieties of female outline (next page). I don't know if the FGA had from the beginning accommodated people who were seriously interested in the old short-tails by continuing to recognise the FGBS standards for these, but that is what they were doing by 1967, as all the FGA standards for these were the same as they had been in the FGBS. The 1967 standards were actually agreed by a joint meeting of the J&S officials from both organisations, which called itself Guppy Standards Inc., and the copyright of the male standards at least was assigned to this "organisation". I don't remember any further mention of Guppy Standards Inc. after this and I rather think the FGBS had become moribund. With two organisations using the same standards people would probably opt for the more active one - the FGA at that time. Certainly there was a good leavening of ex-FGBS members in the Birmingham Section and the last strength of the FGBS had been in the Midlands.

# FGA 1967 Male and Female Standard Outlines

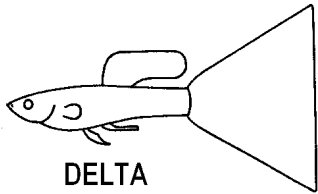


After the 1967 Handbook each outline was given its own page so there were no longer handy single sheets showing all the male and/or female outlines. By 1970 there were 7 varieties of female but no more male outlines had been added (actually one had been killed and reborn, but that's another story). I've included (next page) a version that I drew up in 1973 for the Manchester Section which shows all the outlines that ran to the end of the FGA.

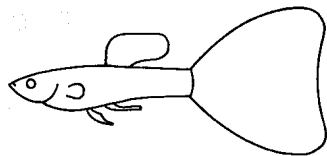
Back then each outline had to be drawn separately in Indian ink so each standard outline almost had its own character - they all had small differences in the shape of the body and the small fins, and different facial expressions. When I did a set of drawings I made templates to draw round for the basic outlines of male and female to get over this, and it was reasonably successful. Nowadays of course it'd be a lot easier to do it by computer!



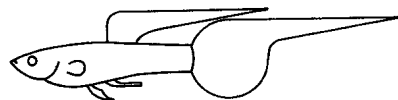
# Standard Outlines drawn for the Manchester Section in 1973



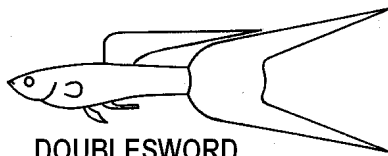
DELTA



SHORT DORSAL VEILTAIL



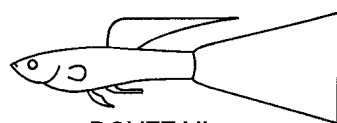
TOPSWORD



DOUBLESWORD



PINTAIL



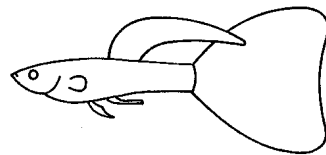
DOVETAIL



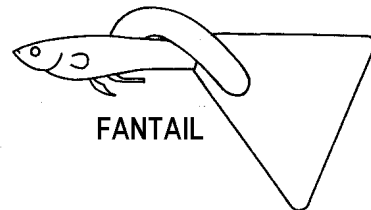
ROUNDTAIL



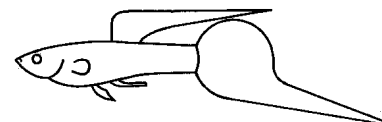
LYRETAIL



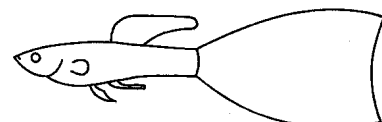
LONG DORSAL VEILTAIL



FANTAIL



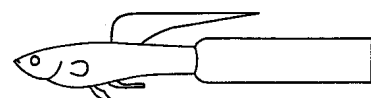
BOTTOMSWORD



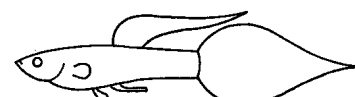
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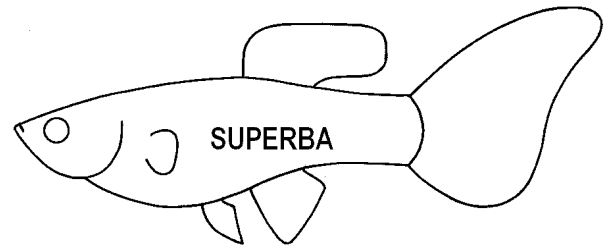
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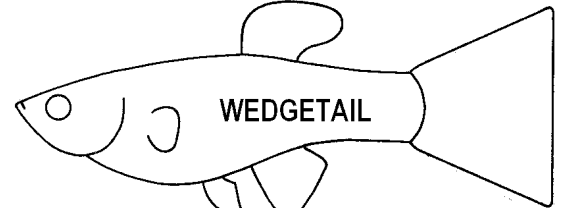
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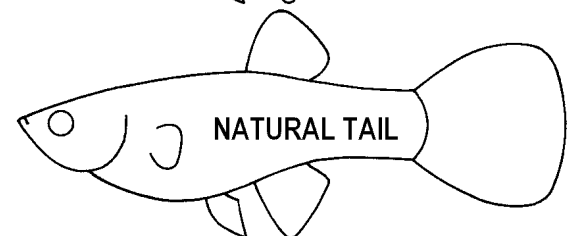
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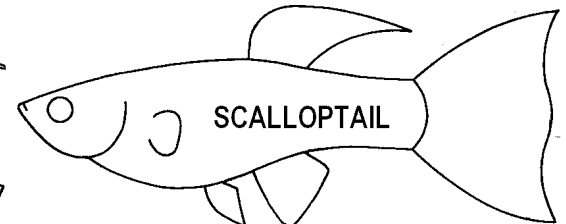
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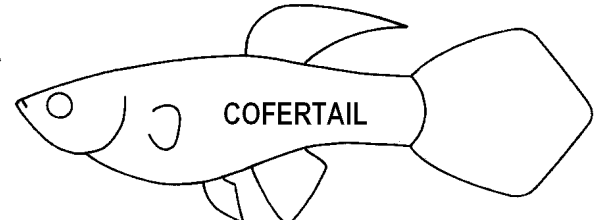
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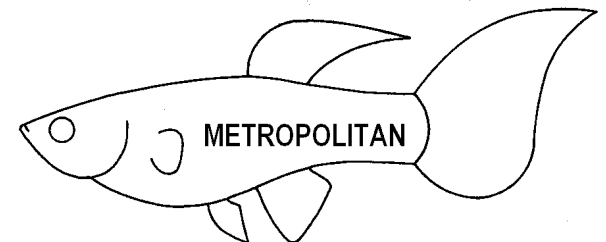
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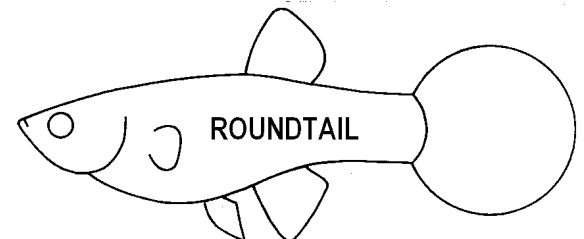
SCALLOPTAIL



COFERTAIL



METROPOLITAN



ROUNDTAIL

There were times when the yardstick of standard outlines became a stick that the FGA beat its own back with. In the earlier Standard Handbooks the outlines were reproduced full size but with no actual measurements given. But in the 1970 Handbook there was a new set of outline drawings and the dimensions of the caudal fins were laid out to the nearest millimeter as well. Ray Young, then chairman of the Manchester Section, took a ruler to the handbook, and found that some of the drawings were wildly different from the stated dimensions! This bombshell was duly dropped into a Judges and Standards Committee meeting, with the result that a new version of the Handbook was issued in 1973. The member who prepared the 1970 drawings supposedly to the dimensions was allowed to live. I might as well add that the 1973 outlines in the Handbook weren't as accurate in dimension as one might have liked, but then no-one in authority liked the versions of outlines I drew either!

Actually the 1970 version of the Handbook had been very well thought out (except for the little matter of accuracy of outlines!). In addition to the outlines, it contained the full set of show rules, the details of the Star Trail, and the Constitution of the FGA. It was made with in loose-leaf form with a slip-on binder so that amendments could easily be put in. But when it was realised all the outline pages had to be redone there had also been changes in the Constitution, the Show Rules, and the Star Trail, so the whole thing was redone and republished as a stapled booklet, at some expense no doubt. The convenience of the loose-leaf form had gone but the constitution and rules kept changing regardless.....

## Living with Standards

When you join an organisation like the FGA at first you have to accept the ways of doing things as you find them. So there are the standard outlines and you use them to classify your fish and to judge them. With time you may come to think about the background to them. Looking back on the outlines now, though, the short-tail varieties are various accentuations of variants of the wild guppy and they are quite distinct from one another on the whole (though you might wonder about the relationship between lyretail and doublesword, and where the scarftail fitted in). The broadtails are not like this. They are all fish in which there has been a major change - the whole caudal has been extended..... and historically, progressively widened. In a sense they are all the same variety developed to different degrees.



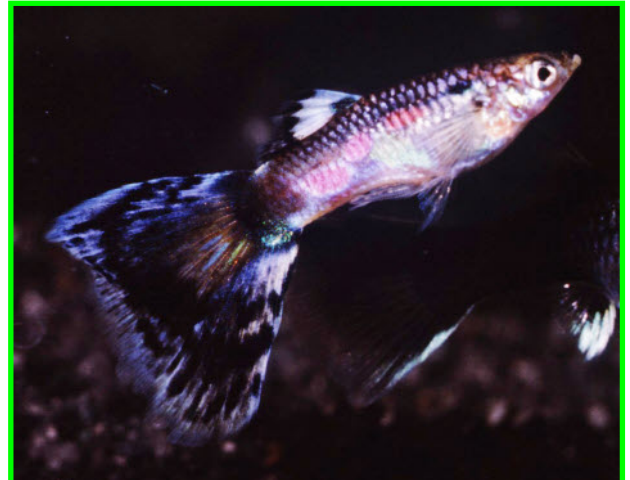
Here's the \$64000 question - were the different broadtail standard outlines set by FGA breeders aiming consciously and selectively for a particular outline? Generally, I don't think so. I think on the whole they basically bred for the widest firmest caudals, a principle which obviously the American breeders of the time followed. Just look at the illustrations of broadtail guppies in American publications from the 1950's onwards. The finnage of broadtail guppies continues to grow for a long time, so individual fish could progress from short dorsal veiltail to long dorsal veil, or to delta.... and any broadtail that survived long enough to begin to droop would become a fantail. I doubt if anyone ever deliberately bred original veiltails or dovetails in my time - they just popped out of random matings or came from shops. All these broadtail standards that the FGA had - really they just allowed exhibitors to get more awards! But I don't think they were deliberately conceived for this, probably the more evidently different versions were selected as the basis for standards.



The FGA rules were very specific on how a new variety should be accepted as a new standard outline. They said :- “The Experimental Class shall be a non-competitive class. It will contain Three Males or Three Females in one show jar. The exhibitor will have available literature - explaining his/her experimental aims, past breeding of the fish and any other information that will help the Judge form an opinion of the entry. The Judge will inspect the entry and his written remarks will be forwarded to the Chairman of the J. & S. Committee for discussion at the following Judges Conference. A member must produce his/her fish and all experimental records at the Judges Conference if he/she is to propose them as an F.G.A. Standard and also at the following Judges Conference in order to get them ratified.”

During my time in the FGA two new female outlines and one new male outline were introduced. But only one followed the rules! The male Dovetail outline is a strange case. The old Flagtail was deleted around 1967 as being outmoded. By 1973 a new outline, the Dovetail, was introduced. Obviously very closely related to the old Flagtail, it wasn't exactly the same. So did it go through the procedure above for a new outline? No it didn't..... some bright spark pointed out to the J & S that in Europe they were still showing an outline which the Germans and Austrians called Facher - if we were going to invade Europe with our guppies we should have this standard too. It was instantly introduced and rebranded Dovetail which sounded nicer. Similarly the Natural-Tail Female was just suddenly accepted as a standard. These were simply cases where a standard was created to accomodate fish that already existed. Only the Cofer-Tail Female went through the full procedure of experimental class, breeders records, etc. and this happened because one breeder, Ken Rigby, set himself the task of developing and stabilising the specific outline.

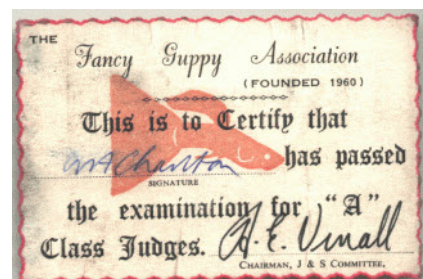
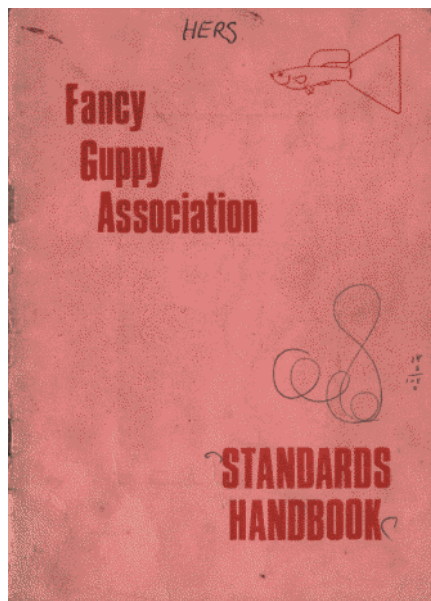
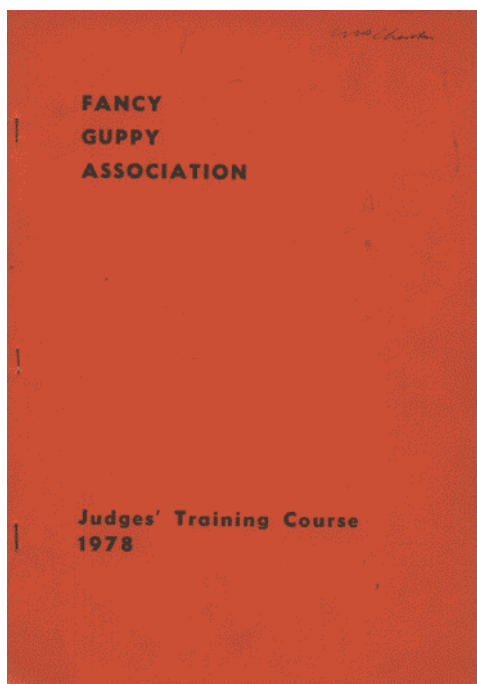
A summary of my flow here - standards were always created to suit the fish that people bred. To go on with the flow - as soon as you have a fixed standard it acts as a yardstick to measure against. And you need this in any competitive activity. You also need not to make it all too difficult for the average enthusiast to achieve some results, so a larger range of standards helps with this. Obviously the same result can be achieved in different ways - if you have fewer standard outlines then it helps to separate by colour and this obviously happened in other countries.



Since the FGA never normally separated exhibits by colour (though it briefly admitted the possibility for half-black and related colours) it didn't have to think what to do with fish like these two! There'd have been no point in exhibiting them in the FGA as they'd just be downgraded on poor colour. The male is actually the original type of “Gold” basic body colour as described by geneticists, and the female is “Blond” in their terms, with the addition of the half-black character.







## FGA Judging

Judging at FGA shows was relatively uncontroversial, and this was probably because there was quite an effort to make sure that fledgling judges received a decent amount of training and assessment. In the latter days of the FGA a 26-page Judges Training Course Manual was produced, and some of the hints and tips in it would probably still be of interest to other aquarium judges. To qualify as a judge you had to be assessed in action and there was even a written examination for A-class judges. There was one feature of FGA judging that upset newcomers occasionally. Several judges might work one show, and each class was judged independently on its own merits. When all the classes had been judged the Best awards were determined from the class winners by a panel of all the judges. It was accepted that there would be minor variation between the pointing of judges in the individual classes and so individual points were ignored here. It was therefore quite possible for the Best in Show to have lower points than some of the other class winners, and this was known to discommode people accustomed to general shows like those run by the FNAS, where best in show etc. had to have the highest points score. Judges in FNAS shows consequently had to keep a running tally as they worked through the classes and a sort of points inflation resulted - and I remember there was sometimes serious trouble when FNAS judges disagreed among themselves with the results of their system. A problem which arose at times - the FGA show rules demanded that breeders teams must have been bred by the exhibitor. This was sometimes contravened and we actually heard this remark about a breeders team once "well, we've never kept them together since we bought them". Also, matching was a major element in the judging of breeders teams - and sometimes you would find a set of males and a set of females in a breeders pairs which couldn't possibly make a true-breeding strain. For instance, grey-bodied males with half-black females. So a judge would give low points for matching and the exhibitor would complain later, swearing on mother's grave that the fish were brothers and sisters. Then there was also the "bought guppy problem" which arose quite often..... "why didn't my fish win? I paid £5.....£15.... £50 for this fish".... "errrm, well, it doesn't match any standard"....."but it must be good, look what I paid for it" and so on around again. These are the sort of occasions that convince you that truth and diplomacy don't necessarily go together!

## Finales

The FGA began its life at Belle Vue at Manchester in 1960 (though I believe the meeting of minds which actually began it happened in a Wimpy Bar in Manchester) at a time when Belle Vue Zoo and the associated gardens and Exhibition Halls were flourishing. The British Aquarists Festival held at Belle Vue, and the organisation which ran it, the Federation of Northern Aquarium Societies, were flourishing too. All these institutions wore down at about the same time.....



Jim Kelly, Paul Hahnel, Connie Kelly  
in the Tudor Room, Belle Vue, 1963

Reproduced with permission from Petfish Monthly

The zoo was closed at Belle Vue in 1977-8, and most of the other facilities at Belle Vue including the Exhibition Hall in which the BAF was held were demolished by 1982, with the final bits of structure going in 1985. Attendances to everything had fallen and running costs were escalating. There is a history of Belle Vue, "The Belle Vue Story" by Robert Nicholls which goes into detail and is probably still available (published by Neil Richardson in 1992). Among the very last buildings to go was the Longsight Hotel which had incorporated the Tudor Room - where the Manchester Section had held many meetings and which had even been graced by the presence of Paul Hahnel in 1963.

The BAF and FNAS continued to exist. The BAF was held in the early 1980's in a sort of club hall near Trafford Park on the west side of Manchester, and it was a vestige of what it had been. By 2006 it had sunk to using a Working Men's Club in Darwen Lancs. The FNAS seems to be in a state of tenuous existence and it has a tiny web site. It announced a BAF in the Darwen location for 2007 - did it happen? there's nothing out there on the web.

Terminal decline set in to the FGA in 1982 and to us it was marked by an abortive Judges and Standards conference in late 1982. This would originally have been held in conjunction with a Birmingham Section meeting. There was just not enough attendance to have a Judges meeting and there was no Birmingham Section left to meet.. The FGA Journal, which had once been the lifeline that tied the national membership together, ceased publication in early 1983. The editor at the time, Henry Vinall, had tried hard to raise contributions but there were none forthcoming. Only the Metropolitan Section was left functioning at all by the end of 1982 and it effectively became the FGA. It announced an Open Show to be held in May 1983, and a National Show to be held in October 1983. Attempts were made to keep national membership going, and existing members were invited to renew their subscriptions - at a reduced rate to compensate for the lack of a journal! We never heard anything from the organisation after that and we considered it to be totally dead.

## People and stuff

In this section I've assembled a grab-bag of photographs from the FGA days and a few words on some of the personalities we remember. But firstly Jim Kelly - the founding father of the whole thing - deserves a special mention.

Jim was a dynamic individual who was responsible for much of the structure of the FGA, constitution, show rules, the lot. He owned a little pet shop in Beswick, north-east Manchester, and had quite wide knowledge of aquarium technique (later he wrote for magazines such as *Petfish Monthly* under his own name and also I believe as "Peter Unwin", and published a book or two on aquarium subjects). He began the *Journal of the FGA*, was its first editor, and he wrote many of the articles in it too under his own name and probably others. As Editor of the the *FGA Journal* he won an award for Best Editor of an Aquarium Society magazine which gave a trip around the aquarium world of the USA in 1965 him the trip. The trip gave him a lot of good material that he used subsequently for talks to aquarium societies. I think it must have included a visit to Calgary as well, for it was an individual in the Calgary society that subsequently donated the "Calgary Trophy" which was given to the section gaining the most awards at the FGA International show.

Bill Murray's character in the film "Ghostbusters" was described by someone "this man is a consummate snowball artist" and somehow this always reminds me of Jim Kelly. He was popular as a speaker in the FGA and with aquarium societies but he could cheerfully misrepresent genetics and misidentify fish on occasion. He would sometimes imply that he was involved in research in genetics - not true - but I suspect he had been to some evening classes that gave him the inspiration. There was no malicious intent in his activities, he just could not resist spinning a line. He would certainly go out of his way to help people and he had a genuine sense of public responsibility.

One thing Jim never pretended to be - was a successful guppy breeder. I don't think he got as far as the Gold Badge in the Star Trail he had devised, and I never saw him bring a guppy to a meeting. But it's not unusual to find that a "committee person" to become more interested in the organisation itself than its central activity. I think the last Chairman of the FGA, Henry Vinall, was like that too, although he had been a very successful breeder in his time and had won the Gold Jewelled Badge

After starting and running the FGA and its *Journal* for some ten years - Jim resigned and disappeared. And he disappeared totally, because at the same time the little pet shop he had in Beswick was demolished with the surrounding area for redevelopment. It all contributed to the infamous "Fort Beswick" housing project which was a total disaster and was demolished within a few years. I think there was a sighting of Jim at a society show in the early 1970's and that was it. There was a rumour that he went off to train as a teacher, and there were occasional rumours later that he had been seen - but these were rather like UFO sightings. Everything related to him became elusive, even people who were reported to have seen him!





Graham Fletcher, at left, David Beacham (Birmingham) dealing with the paperwork of an International Show. Probably the back view is Fred Campbell.



Benching for an International Show. Seated it's Ben Beacham Junior at left, David Beacham at right. I don't remember the names of the other people in the view.



The two Dons, Curry at left and Phillimore at right. At a Judges Conference, with Don Curry's exhortatory guppy in a jar on the table.



Judge Training. Ray Francis at left, pointing out the elements to a trainee.



Lunch before a meeting at Birmingham - left to right, Alan Charlton, Ray Young, Danny Glen.



Handy for a break from the International Show at Birmingham - The Glebe. Left to right - Bill Blades, Alan Charlton (seated), Danny Glen, Peigi Young, Fred Campbell



A working lunch at the Show Secretary's table at Manchester - Fred Campbell at left, John Hesketh at right. David Beacham standing and a back view of Sam Croft.



## People - in no particular order

Fred Campbell - founder

He was in right at the start of the FGA in 1960 and would entertain everyone with his tales of the early meetings at Caesar's Palace at Belle Vue in Manchester. Don't let the grand name fool you - this was just a pub really! I have to say that Fred was one of nature's gentlemen. He worked on the railway, as a clerk and ultimately office manager, having started with the LMS in 1926. He taught himself to type in the course of this career and used this talent for the benefit of the FGA - but made much more use of it as a historical writer, mostly local history. Although he died in 1991, some of his books are still in print I believe. We saw "Oxen, Oatcakes and Ale" - published by Neil Richardson - in a bookshop not many months ago. The manuscript of an autobiographical book on his railway career, "Was My Journey Really Necessary?", which was never published in its entirety, is now in the archives of the National Railway Museum at York. When we joined the FGA Fred had filled various committee positions and was at that time the Secretary of the Association. His last role was Secretary of the Manchester Section, up to the end of the Section's existence. Over the years he had done so much for the FGA that he was given a unique award by being made an Honorary Life Member - the only one the FGA ever had, I believe. Although he wasn't a prominent guppy breeder he pegged along with short-tail guppies - and used to remark about female guppies - "I believe they're born gravid". In addition to writing and guppies, his recreations were beer and tomatoes. It seems he was inspired into tomato growing by the improvised polythene and scrap timber greenhouses he saw near the Birmingham Section's meeting place in Stechford. Beer - well, he'd not been a drinker until World War 2 when Army life introduced him to it. As he said, he'd spent the rest of his time catching up.

The Beachams

There was Pop Beacham, known as Ben Senior, and three sons. I remember David Beacham who played a large part in the Birmingham Section and as Association Show Secretary in the 1970's, and there was a Ben Junior and a Graham who appeared less frequently. David was great friends with Malcolm Delingpole and when they came up the motorway to northern section meetings in Malcolm's Ferguson FF David had the privilege of driving this chariot.

Beresford and Jeffery

They were a long-standing showing partnership. I think both Roy Beresford and John Jeffery went back almost to the beginning of the FGA. They were supposed to have gone through the whole star trail up to the Gold Jewelled Guppy award twice in their day, but there was no means at that early time for commemorating this achievement. They both filled Association posts in the early years - Roy was Association Secretary, and John was Treasurer until 1970.

The Corns Family.

Marian Corns had been an active FGA judge, and then vanished before we joined the association in 1969. But the whole family rejoined some time later for a while and made a rather interesting impression - as they said, "we're only here for t'grub and t'raffle" and the kids made sure of the raffle. They got the job of selling the tickets, and for a while we wondered how the family managed to win so often. Then we found the kids were selling the family one colour of ticket and everyone else got a different colour.....

Don Curry

Don was one of the two Large Dons of the Edmonton Section. A genial giant, a very active breeder and exhibitor in his day, he became the chairman of the Judges and Standards Committee after Ken Rigby had gone. At one J & S meeting he produced a show jar with a guppy in it - and said to the meeting "remember, this is what it's all about". There was some point in this remark because some of these meetings produced major clashes of personality!

### Phil Duffy

A member of the Manchester Section but he came from the Nottingham area, from the 60's into the 70's. He had some beautifully coloured broadtail fish and did well on the show bench. I remember coveting some bright green deltas he had. He would cheerfully pass out progeny of his fish, but this was another case where no-one made anything of the stock. Then it was reported that he kept all his fish permanently in jars, not tanks. How would he be able to produce those lovely breeders teams? Malcolm Delingpole got rather concerned about this and wanted some sort of official visit of inspection. This never came about and Mr. Duffy was never seen again either.

### George Goodall

Another larger-than-life character from the London area, I think he was the mainstay of the Radlett section for a long time. Often known as "Georgeous George"!

### Sam Croft, wife Julie Croft & her sister Joyce Johnson.

This trio played a major part in the organisation and running of the Birmingham section for many years. Sam also did a fake Oriental mind-reading act for party occasions. Julie and Joyce would sit near the front at AGM's, knitting - reminding some of the tricotteuses who performed the same function in front of Madame Guillotine during the French Revolution! Julie was not noted for tact. Two instances remain in memory. On one occasion at a Birmingham meeting a member came into the meeting a few minutes after 2 pm only to be greeted by Joyce with a snapped "It's after 2 o'clock, you're too late to bench your fish" and he went away, never returning to the section as far as I know. Then there was the matter of the refreshments at section meetings at Manchester in the better days. The Croft menage always brought (a) their alsatian and (b) their own lunch, but Julie happily proclaimed as she bought refreshments "well, they're cheap so we just buy them for the dog". The refreshments were subsidised by the committee ladies and this didn't go down too well.

### Malcolm Delingpole

Noted for his dash to Vienna in 1968 with a carload of guppies, Malcolm had a family tradition of interest in fast-moving mechanical objects - to quote an article from the website of the Dellow sports car enthusiast club:- "Ken Delingpole and Ron Lowe combined more than just their surnames when they set up a tuning company as an offshoot of Ken's business: Delson & Co., manufacturers of bolts, screws and fastenings, situated at Alvechurch near Birmingham in 1946." Actually the Delson connection stood the FGA in good stead for some time. When Malcolm was the editor of the FGA Journal it was typed up, duplicated, assembled and mailed out from Delson! Malcolm always drove something fast and expensive, and probably the most notable was a Ferguson FF which came to a sad end, and not on the road either - beaten up beyond economic repair in a shunt on a car ferry or some such.

I believe Malcolm came to the FGA from the remains of the FGBS in the Birmingham area. He was very active in the FGA until he got more interested in reptiles. At the peak of his FGA activity Malcolm had perhaps 100 tanks of guppies and employed "a man" to look after them. For quite a time he handed out lots of Vienna Green doubleswords descended from stock acquired in Vienna in 1968, but he was a guppy man of all standards. On his travels he passed by the guppy scene in California, where he met the great Midge Hill and this resulted in a number of Californian entries coming to the Birmingham International in the early 1970's. A batch of Midge Hill's red-tailed albino deltas came over and descendants of these passed to many breeders.

### John and Ida Hesketh

John was Association Show Secretary in the late 1960's until 1971. He kept the show records and people's progress along the Star Trail in meticulous order. John was meticulous about everything in fact. He had a small but sparkling clean fish house at this time, in which he determinedly bred scarftail guppies. This was no easy task as there were probably no real strains of the standard then. He also did an impressive job of prefabricated electrical boards for the FGA stands at the BAF. Ida was a mainstay of the Ladies who provided the refreshments.



#### Phil Jinks

I knew Phil as a member of the Birmingham Section, but he'd been around a lot longer than the FGA. He was one of the old-stagers from the FGBS and he was quietly more knowledgeable about guppies and their genetics than many realised. I first met his name attached to genetics matters in the long-vanished monthly Water Life, in the early 1950's! Cofertails and other short-tails seemed to be his speciality.

#### Bill Myers

Bill, from the South London Section, was another old-stager who knew a lot more than most about guppy genetics but kept his light under a bushel most of the time.

#### Vic Partington

Another early Manchester member who made a big impression on the show bench with broadtails. There were secrets about his guppies that were never revealed. People could persuade him to sell some breeding stock, quite expensively, but I don't think anyone ever managed to breed anything but rubbish from the fish they got. He may have been breeding a succession of hybrids, so there was never a true-breeding line. Other less kind explanations were suggested.

#### Don Phillimore

The other Large Don of the Edmonton Section. He was Secretary of the Judges and Standards Committee at the same time as Don Curry was chair. Perhaps he was a little too hot-tempered to be an ideal committee member. Also a very successful breeder, he produced some stunning breeders teams of fish. Others did not have much success with stock from him and I am pretty sure he was an accomplished hybridiser. I remember him saying something about "split broods" in broadtails which related to that, it means you've bred with females carrying two different X chromosomes and so you get two distinct kinds of males in the progeny. He showed some broadtails with colour combinations that I never saw in commercial imported guppies, or anywhere else for that matter. For instance there was one type with a red mottled delta caudal and the body markings of a Vienna Green (not the same as snakeskin/cobra).

#### Ken Rigby

Judges & Standards Committee chairman in the late 1960's to early 70's. He became the acting chairman of the Association and the Manchester Section after Jim Kelly resigned in 1970 and was going to stand officially for FGA chairman in 1971 but decided these things were not for him. Cacti were more fun, apparently. In this period he was a very erratic attendee at the committee meetings - often giving no notice, just failing to turn up. After the administration of the society moved away from Manchester it was necessary to collect some assorted FGA material from his home, and this caused great amusement among the committee members who went for it. Ken wasn't there but Mrs. Rigby was, and she commented on how much time he'd spent going off to all those committee meetings in the evenings!

#### Alan Swain & Mrs.

A couple of Manchester section stalwarts for a few years who gave some good if unintentional amusement. I don't know if Mr. Swain had a bank account - if he had to pay for anything (which he didn't do with any enthusiasm) he'd pull out a big greasy wodge of paper money held together with an elastic band. The Swains didn't always have their own transport and they were known occasionally to make the journey to Section meetings by bus - with Mrs. Swain carefully holding a tray bearing their guppies in jars ready for the show bench. We also learned from Mr. Swain's account of their holiday trip in a bargain basement car - what to do with your car to get home without paying for a tow when a big-end went..... disconnect each spark plug in turn until the knock stopped, then drive home gently with that cylinder carrying no load.

#### Charlie and Audrey Truman

Charlie was probably the FGA's only blind member. They lived in the Bristol area and quite often got to Birmingham section meetings in the mid 1970's. Charlie must have lost his sight at a relatively late stage. His wife Audrey did all the guppy-keeping and described the guppies to him in intense detail, and he directed breeding operations. It sounds unworkable but it did work. They produced some impressive guppies with some quite unusual colours, including the first purple caudals I ever saw.

Henry Vinall

Originally from the Edmonton section. He was Association Chairman from 1971 until the association began its final wasting process in 1982-3, and was also Chairman of the Judges and Standards Committee in latter days. In his early days in the FGA he showed as a partnership with Alan(?) Fowles and they got to the Gold Jewelled award, mostly with broadtails.

Ray and Peigi Young

Ray was the person who finally got us into the FGA in 1969. Peigi Young was Ray Young's second wife - his first wife had died quite early - and she was another guppy fanatic. She had her own stocks of guppies in her own set of tanks in the fish-house - but Ray managed them all. Ray was a talented guppy breeder who did not need ready-made strains of guppies. I particularly remember some lines the Youngs ran - red-tailed blond deltas, wildly coloured natural-tail females, and a topsword strain related to mine, for instance.

Ray was part of the early management committee of the FGA and became chairman of the Manchester Section eventually after Jim Kelly vanished. He was also Association chairman until control moved away from Manchester. Like Fred Campbell, Ray was another of nature's gentlemen. He had had a varied career and when we met him he was working in production management in Hawker Siddeley Aviation at Woodford in Cheshire (later British Aerospace). I think he could turn his hand to anything in the DIY field and he had a conservatory/fish-house which he had constructed entirely himself, including plumbing and electrics, as well as "his and hers" sets of tanks and stands. I remember many of the switch components had been salvaged from the aero industry and they had complications. They all seemed to be individual and some would lock in the "on" position, some in the "off" and some in either. So the uninitiated would often find a switch that just didn't seem to operate! Ray was also a keen home-brewer and the Hawker Siddeley connections came in handy here too. He had some crown-corking devices (for use in bottling home-brew) constructed unofficially in the factory, among other more surprising things. They can't prosecute him now, as he died prematurely in 1974.

Tom Hallett

An old stager who started with the Pennine Section in 1962. Drawn into the FGA by an encounter with Beresford and Jeffery with a jar of guppies at BAF! For many years he ran a strain of bottomswords that was very successful on the show bench as grey or blond versions. He'd started the line from a cross between a doublesword line from a breeder and a bottomsword male from a tank of assorted guppies in a shop.

Bernie Walker and Dave O'Brien

Two members from the Bristol area. Bernie was an old FGBS man who had a line of topswords that he ran for many years. He passed this on to Dave who did quite well with it for a while but I think eventually it ran down. I seem to remember I gave him some of my topsword females for an outcross, which didn't seem to help him.

Graham and Rosemary Fletcher

A couple in the Birmingham section who were Association Treasurer and Secretary for some time in the 1970's. Graham was the only person in my time who was really making a sustained effort to breed pintails and he was reasonably successful in this.

Oddments

Fred Campbell used to tell a tale of one of the original FGA members - name now lost - who used to drive around the country in a Morris Traveller spreading the gospel of guppies. He obviously didn't spend any time on the car as it had a nice growth of grass in the roof guttering.

A member who I could name - but I won't! He particularly liked what he called Venetian Greens (Vienna Green to you). He only had a tank or two, stocked with these and a variety of other different guppies of both sexes. Apparently he told a visitor - "that Venetian Green male is breeding with that female there...." but we have no idea how he made sure the guppies knew what they had to do.